



THIRTY YEARS ON: THE RUSE OF THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

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Thirty years ago, the so-called Middle East Peace Process (MEPP) was conceived in Madrid. Rather than bring about a just and peaceful future in colonized Palestine through bilateral negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian representatives, the MEPP has instead consolidated a dire reality for Palestinians of permanent occupation by a nuclear military power with an [ever-expanding settler-colonial enterprise](#).

The very framing of direct bilateral negotiations in the context of military occupation is thoroughly iniquitous, only serving to consolidate Israel's settler-colonial agenda and [entrench its domination over the Palestinians](#). In a liberation struggle from military occupation, liberal bilateral negotiations are doomed to fail because the MEPP:

1. *Lacks mutual terms of reference and is not based in good faith*

The US invited both parties to Madrid under the assumption they would abide by [UN Security Council Resolution 242](#), which set the parameters for a “two-state solution.” Yet a two-state solution was [not the basis](#) from which Israeli representatives were working. Rather, they envisioned a limited form of Palestinian autonomy whereby Israel would continue its settler-colonial expansion. To this day, Israel has not recognized Palestinians' existence as a national group, which would acknowledge their right to self-determination.

Within this framework, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has been specifically designed to play a counterinsurgency role in [pacifying and controlling](#) Palestinians instead of leading them to freedom and sovereignty. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) thus traded the Palestinian liberation struggle for a limited form of self-rule within the homeland, completely [besieged by](#), and [dependent on](#), Israel. The option of a Palestinian state thus never existed. The negotiations framework [ensured this](#).

2. *Is imbalanced, with no clear timeline*

Israel leveraged an interim negotiations period as a permanent process. That is, without a clear timeline or incentives for Israel to concede to any of the “final status” issues, Israel focused on leveraging the interim period, dragging out negotiations as a permanent process, thereby allowing it to continue [construction of illegal settlements](#).

For their part, Palestinian negotiators were ill-equipped and ill-prepared to guarantee any of their demands were met. Palestinian cartographer Khalil Tafakji [recounts in his book](#) how he tried to expose to former PA president Yasser Arafat and the PLO representatives the reality of the negotiations: “I don’t know if someone promised you would have a State, but I am speaking starting from the maps, and if we look at the maps, there is no Palestinian State.” Nonetheless, Arafat signed the agreement.

3. Lacks an honest third-party broker or mechanism for accountability

The US has assumed the role of a third-party broker in the MEPP, though it could never be honest given its long-standing and unbridled military and diplomatic support for Israel. The US has not only [failed to hold Israel accountable](#) for its persistent and gross violations of international law and for its [war crimes in Gaza](#), it has also repeatedly used its [veto power](#) at the UN Security Council to prevent others from doing so.

The existence of an open-ended process without a solid grounding in international law, without a clear and equitable outcome for Palestinians, and without an unbiased third-party broker or a mechanism for accountability, has ultimately served Israel’s interests and done little to protect Palestinians.

Recommendations

To ensure the perpetuation of the MEPP, Israel employs three strategies: creating facts on the ground, narrative manipulation and victim blaming, and bullying the international community. The facts on the ground include separating Jerusalem from the West Bank, transferring Palestinians, and encouraging settlers’ population growth. By creating these realities, Israel has made them seem as irreversible, accomplished facts.

Israel has also mastered narrative manipulation, and has managed to blame Palestinians for the failure of negotiations and for the violence inflicted on them. And lastly, Israel bullies the international community whenever there is outcry against Israel’s violations of Palestinian rights. It has also developed a [widespread campaign](#) to delegitimize the Palestinian struggle for their rights, and to escape accountability for its violations.

To break this cycle, the international community must:

- Recognize the futility and unsuitability of the MEPP framework, and focus on a political process centered on the fulfilment of human rights of all.
- Support the Palestinian people’s efforts to reclaim their political system, including in their latest [Unity Intifada](#).
- Support Palestinians in [reviving and transforming the PLO](#) as a liberation movement with diplomatic presence around the world, including by supporting the renouncement of the Oslo Accords and the PA.
- Hold Israel accountable for its gross violations of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law.
- Reject the conflation of [critique of Israel](#) with antisemitism and [terrorism](#).
- Reject normalization agreements between Israel and Arab states as a means to maintain Israel’s [qualitative military edge](#) in the region.